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CHICAGO TRIBUNE  
8 December 1985

# A kick in the teeth from Colgate

WASHINGTON—One of my daughters came home with a new tube of toothpaste the other day and ruined my week.

It had been one of those weeks anyway, and my peace of mind did not really require an introduction to a toothpaste with its own 800 phone number.

First there had been Sen. Jesse Helms, the North Carolina superconservative, meeting with CIA Director William Casey to discuss what Helms and some of his allies think might be a "possible pro-Soviet bias" in the CIA's national security estimates.

The CIA taking a pro-Soviet tilt? Even for Jesse Helms that seemed a bit farfetched.

Then President Reagan went over to Maryland and told a group of high school students that at the recent Geneva summit meeting he had talked with Mikhail Gorbachev about the U.S. teaming up in an alliance with the Russians if Earth were threatened by "alien" invaders from outer space—by "some other species from another planet."

That seemed a touch premature and at least mildly presumptuous to me. How can we be sure those invaders wouldn't be our kind of guys—free enterprisers who eat Big Macs and apple pie and are only interested in the Dow Jones industrial average hitting 1600 and getting an expansion franchise in the National League?

Why should we assume they would represent some kind of "evil empire" more evil than Reagan has said the Soviets are?

All these weighty considerations, however, went by the boards when my daughter brought home the toothpaste. Colgate, it was, in a new-type tube topped by a pump.

The world is getting more and more complicated, I know. Well into my middle age, for instance, we didn't have presidents who were worrying about superpower alliances to ward off aliens from another planet.

But this new toothpaste tube is too much for me. In my whole life I have really mastered only two worthwhile skills—changing typewriter ribbons and getting the cap off and back on a tube of toothpaste.

Almost all modern packaging and definitely all odd jobs defeat me. What I really need to open a can of dog food or change a leaky faucet washer is a large supply of Band-Aids. I qualify for the Purple Heart every time I pick up a can opener or a

## Raymond Coffey

wrench. I've been wounded trying to turn the key in the front door.

But I was good at typewriter ribbons and toothpaste caps.

Then we threw out typewriters and switched to computers and overnight I became 50 percent technologically obsolete.

Now the toothpaste people are on the way to making me totally useless and incompetent. I'm going to have to start all over again. I may be pushed into early retirement.

Certainly there will be no room for me in the 21st Century.

This new pump-type toothpaste tube comes complete with instructions. "Instructions. Remove white protective tab from nozzle [A] and discard. Depress white button [B] to dispense gel. Replace outer cap after use."

For the functionally illiterate among us there is also a diagram.

Can you imagine it? Having to take lessons in how to operate your toothpaste tube? Back in the good old days we took lessons in how to tie shoelaces but most of us, I believe, just went out on our own and mastered the problem of getting toothpaste out of the tube without help from anyone.

Colgate also seems to have lost faith in the fabled American spirit of the pioneers, of can-do adventurousness and self-confident self-reliance.

Along with the written instructions and diagram on how to operate the new toothpaste tube, it has included, on the box and on the tube itself, this note:

"If you have any questions or comments about the Colgate pump, please call us toll-free at 1-800-221-4607."

I can picture a lot of people [starting with me] calling with comments. But can you imagine anyone with any sense of self-esteem calling a toothpaste company and admitting he needs help getting the toothpaste out of the tube?

That would be humiliating. I still think I may be able to do it on my own. Just give me another three or four weeks to practice.